

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

KIRKSVILLE EL VAQUERO RESTAURANT MANAGER AND SIX OTHERS INDICTED FOR IDENTITY THEFT IN EMPLOYING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

St. Louis, MO: The co-owner and manager of a Kirksville restaurant and six people have been indicted on multiple charges involving the fraudulent use of the social security numbers of others in order to employ undocumented workers, United States Attorney Catherine L. Hanaway announced today.

“The seven individuals charged were allegedly involved in a conspiracy to use fraudulent social security numbers for the employment of undocumented workers at the El Vaquero Restaurant,” said Hanaway. “Additionally, Neftali and Zoraida Lopez are charged with concealing and shielding the undocumented workers from the detection of authorities.”

According to the indictment, between June 2004 and March 2008, Neftali Lopez hired individuals including his brother-in-law, Jesus Villalba Pedrosa, and five of the other defendants charged, to work in a restaurant he co-owned and managed in Kirksville, knowing they had entered the United States without authorization. Neftali Lopez instructed employees to obtain false social security cards and resident alien cards, and provided information about distributors of these false cards. The indictment alleges that from February 2006 through March 2008, Neftali and Zoraida Lopez falsified Employment Verification forms for Julio Cesar Villa Navarro, Filemon Abrajan Beltran, Jesus Villalba Pedrosa, Ambrocio Olvera Alvarez and Pedro Santos.

Indicted:

NEFTALI LOPEZ, , 33, Kirksville, Missouri;

ZORAIDA LOPEZ, 31, Kirksville, Missouri;

JULIO CESAR VILLA NAVARRO, 24, Kirksville, Missouri;

FILEMON ABRAJAN BELTRAN, 36, Kirksville, Missouri;
JESUS VILLALBA PEDROSA, 35, Kirksville, Missouri;
AMBROCIO OLVERA ALVAREZ, 56, Kirksville, Missouri; and
PEDRO SANTOS, 23, Kirksville, Missouri.

Each defendant was indicted by a federal grand jury late Wednesday on multiple felony counts including, conspiracy to defraud, identity theft, and social security fraud. Neftali and Zoraida Lopez also charged with harboring illegal aliens. The indictment remained sealed until the arrest of Neftali Lopez earlier today.

If convicted, each of the following charges carry maximum penalties of:

Conspiracy to defraud, five years prison and/or fines up to \$250,000;

Aggravated identity theft, mandatory two years prison consecutive to other prison terms and/or fines up to \$250,000;

Social Security fraud, five years in prison and/or fines up to \$250,000;

Identity theft, fifteen years prison and/or fines up to \$250,000; and,

Harboring illegal aliens (undocumented workers), five years in prison and/or fines up to \$250,000.

Hanaway commended the work on the case by the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, Postal Inspection Service, and the Adair County Sheriff's Department, the Kirksville Police Department and Assistant United States Attorney Tracy Berry, who is handling the case for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The charges set forth in an indictment are merely accusations, and each defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.